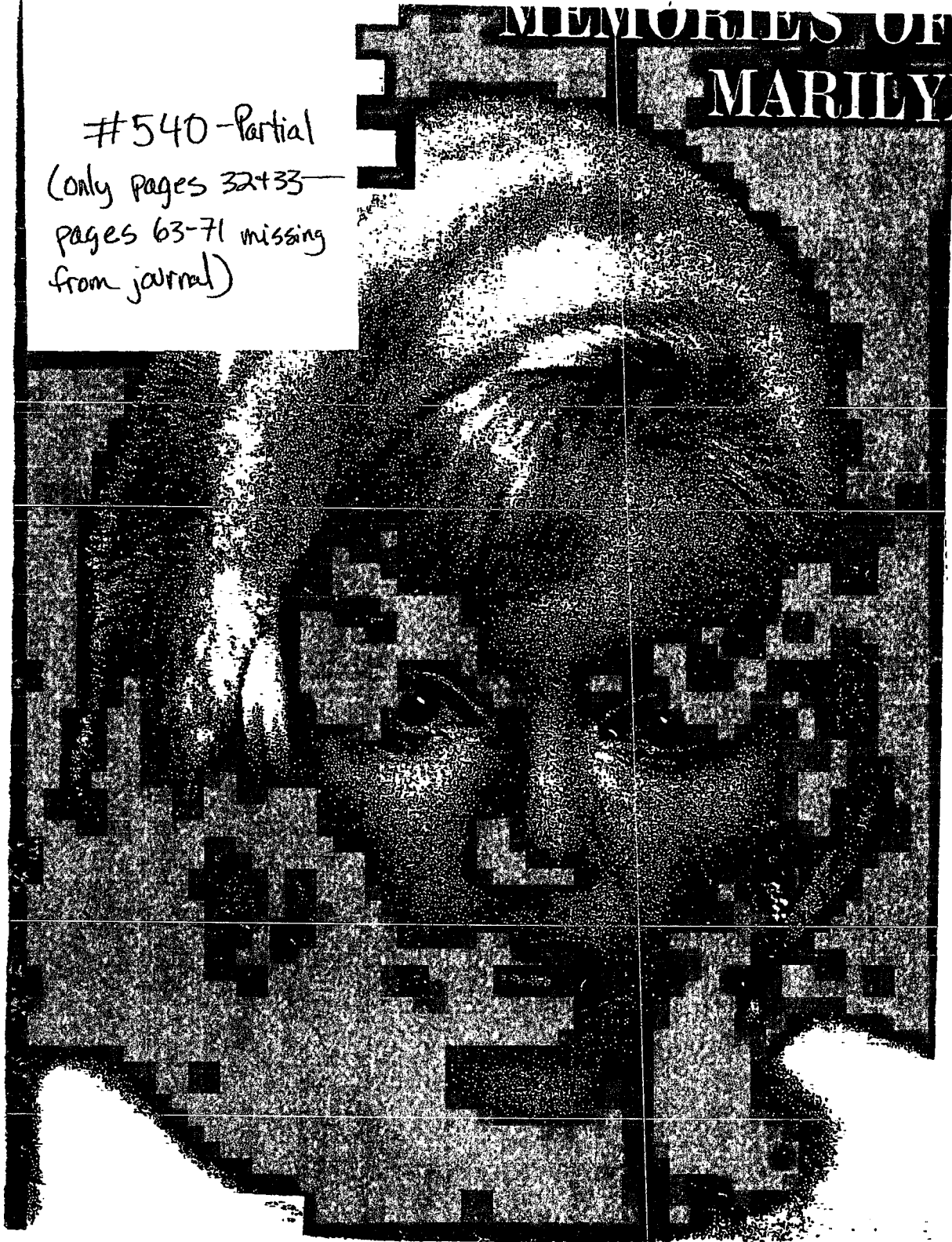


# EXHIBIT

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# LIFE

## STORY OF THE WEEK

Science finds new clues to the mysteries of lightning's fearsome bolts 20

## EDITORIALS

New Congress should take lead in lawmaking 4  
Stand against featherbedding

## NEWSFRONTS OF THE WORLD

## COLOR SPECTACLE

Montagna: Impassioned and irascible pioneer of Renaissance art. Photographed for LIFE by Dmitri Kessel 48

## ARTICLES OF THE WEEK

Last talk with a lonely girl. By Richard Merymen 32  
The antic magic of Central Park. By Robert Wallace. Photographed for LIFE by Leonard McCombe 72

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Remember Marilyn 63

## SPOTLIGHT

A bouquet of blossoming blondes. Photographed for LIFE by Peter Stackpole 65

## DEPARTMENTS

Sports: a lure fish can't pass up 39  
Special Report: a Mr. Million Miami missed. By David Nevin 13  
LIFE GUIDE to industrial tours, books, festivals, movies, records 19  
Letters to the Editors 15  
Miscellany: double ducks of distinction 82

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COVER—JANUARY SCHILLER  
12—A.J. F. INC. PICTORIAL PARADE  
13—DICK KENNEDY OF THE HONORABLE  
14—CROWD BY JOHN STEINBERGER  
20—WILLIAM L. WIDMAYER  
21—TWO FILMS FOR THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
22—JAMES H. HUNTER—CIVIL PICTURES  
23—A. FITE GROSS—TWO RECIPIES BY  
24—J. H. FINE—STILL-LIFE—A. WEST  
25—J. H. FINE—STILL-LIFE—A. WEST  
26—J. H. FINE—STILL-LIFE—A. WEST  
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180a, 181a, 182a, 183a, 184a, 185a, 186a, 187a, 188a, 189a, 190a, 191a, 192a, 193a, 194a, 195a, 196a, 197a, 198a, 199a, 200a, 201a, 202a, 203a, 204a, 205a, 206a, 207a, 208a, 209a, 210a, 211a, 212a, 213a, 214a, 215a, 216a, 217a, 218a, 219a, 220a, 221a, 222a, 223a, 224a, 225a, 226a, 227a, 228a, 229a, 230a, 231a, 232a, 233a, 234a, 235a, 236a, 237a, 238a, 239a, 240a, 241a, 242a, 243a, 244a, 245a, 246a, 247a, 248a, 249a, 250a, 251a, 252a, 253a, 254a, 255a, 256a, 257a, 258a, 259a, 260a, 261a, 262a, 263a, 264a, 265a, 266a, 267a, 268a, 269a, 270a, 271a, 272a, 273a, 274a, 275a, 276a, 277a, 278a, 279a, 280a, 281a, 282a, 283a, 284a, 285a, 286a, 287a, 288a, 289a, 290a, 291a, 292a, 293a, 294a, 295a, 296a, 297a, 298a, 299a, 300a, 301a, 302a, 303a, 304a, 305a, 306a, 307a, 308a, 309a, 310a, 311a, 312a, 313a, 314a, 315a, 316a, 317a, 318a, 319a, 320a, 321a, 322a, 323a, 324a, 325a, 326a, 327a, 328a, 329a, 330a, 331a, 332a, 333a, 334a, 335a, 336a, 337a, 338a, 339a, 340a, 341a, 342a, 343a, 344a, 345a, 346a, 347a, 348a, 349a, 350a, 351a, 352a, 353a, 354a, 355a, 356a, 357a, 358a, 359a, 360a, 361a, 362a, 363a, 364a, 365a, 366a, 367a, 368a, 369a, 370a, 371a, 372a, 373a, 374a, 375a, 376a, 377a, 378a, 379a, 380a, 381a, 382a, 383a, 384a, 385a, 386a, 387a, 388a, 389a, 390a, 391a, 392a, 393a, 394a, 395a, 396a, 397a, 398a, 399a, 400a, 401a, 402a, 403a, 404a, 405a, 406a, 407a, 408a, 409a, 410a, 411a, 412a, 413a, 414a, 415a, 416a, 417a, 418a, 419a, 420a, 421a, 422a, 423a, 424a, 425a, 426a, 427a, 428a, 429a, 430a, 431a, 432a, 433a, 434a, 435a, 436a, 437a, 438a, 439a, 440a, 441a, 442a, 443a, 444a, 445a, 446a, 447a, 448a, 449a, 450a, 451a, 452a, 453a, 454a, 455a, 456a, 457a, 458a, 459a, 460a, 461a, 462a, 463a, 464a, 465a, 466a, 467a, 468a, 469a, 470a, 471a, 472a, 473a, 474a, 475a, 476a, 477a, 478a, 479a, 480a, 481a, 482a, 483a, 484a, 485a, 486a, 487a, 488a, 489a, 490a, 491a, 492a, 493a, 494a, 495a, 496a, 497a, 498a, 499a, 500a, 501a, 502a, 503a, 504a, 505a, 506a, 507a, 508a, 509a, 510a, 511a, 512a, 513a, 514a, 515a, 516a, 517a, 518a, 519a, 520a, 521a, 522a, 523a, 524a, 525a, 526a, 527a, 528a, 529a, 530a, 531a, 532a, 533a, 534a, 535a, 536a, 537a, 538a, 539a, 540a, 541a, 542a, 543a, 544a, 545a, 546a, 547a, 548a, 549a, 550a, 551a, 552a, 553a, 554a, 555a, 556a, 557a, 558a, 559a, 560a, 561a, 562a, 563a, 564a, 565a, 566a, 567a, 568a, 569a, 570a, 571a, 572a, 573a, 574a, 575a, 576a, 577a, 578a, 579a, 580a, 581a, 582a, 583a, 584a, 585a, 586a, 587a, 588a, 589a, 590a, 591a, 592a, 593a, 594a, 595a, 596a, 597a, 598a, 599a, 600a, 601a, 602a, 603a, 604a, 605a, 606a, 607a, 608a, 609a, 610a, 611a, 612a, 613a, 614a, 615a, 616a, 617a, 618a, 619a, 620a, 621a, 622a, 623a, 624a, 625a, 626a, 627a, 628a, 629a, 630a, 631a, 632a, 633a, 634a, 635a, 636a, 637a, 638a, 639a, 640a, 641a, 642a, 643a, 644a, 645a, 646a, 647a, 648a, 649a, 650a, 651a, 652a, 653a, 654a, 655a, 656a, 657a, 658a, 659a, 660a, 661a, 662a, 663a, 664a, 665a, 666a, 667a, 668a, 669a, 670a, 671a, 672a, 673a, 674a, 675a, 676a, 677a, 678a, 679a, 680a, 681a, 682a, 683a, 684a, 685a, 686a, 687a, 688a, 689a, 690a, 691a, 692a, 693a, 694a, 695a, 696a, 697a, 698a, 699a, 700a, 701a, 702a, 703a, 704a, 705a, 706a, 707a, 708a, 709a, 710a, 711a, 712a, 713a, 714a, 715a, 716a, 717a, 718a, 719a, 720a, 721a, 722a, 723a, 724a, 725a, 726a, 727a, 728a, 729a, 730a, 731a, 732a, 733a, 734a, 735a, 736a, 737a, 738a, 739a, 740a, 741a, 742a, 743a, 744a, 745a, 746a, 747a, 748a, 749a, 750a, 751a, 752a, 753a, 754a, 755a, 756a, 757a, 758a, 759a, 760a, 761a, 762a, 763a, 764a, 765a, 766a, 767a, 768a, 769a, 770a, 771a, 772a, 773a, 774a, 775a, 776a, 777a, 778a, 779a, 780a, 781a, 782a, 783a, 784a, 785a, 786a, 787a, 788a, 789a, 790a, 791a, 792a, 793a, 794a, 795a, 796a, 797a, 798a, 799a, 800a, 801a, 802a, 803a, 804a, 805a, 806a, 807a, 808a, 809a, 810a, 811a, 812a, 813a, 814a, 815a, 816a, 817a, 818a, 819a, 820a, 821a, 822a, 823a, 824a, 825a, 826a, 827a, 828a, 829a, 830a, 831a, 832a, 833a, 834a, 835a, 836a, 837a, 838a, 839a, 840a, 841a, 842a, 843a, 844a, 845a, 846a, 847a, 848a, 849a, 850a, 851a, 852a, 853a, 854a, 855a, 856a, 857a, 858a, 859a, 860a, 861a, 862a, 863a, 864a, 865a, 866a, 867a, 868a, 869a, 870a, 871a, 872a, 873a, 874a, 875a, 876a, 877a, 878a, 879a, 880a, 881a, 882a, 883a, 884a, 885a, 886a, 887a, 888a, 889a, 890a, 891a, 892a, 893a, 894a, 895a, 896a, 897a, 898a, 899a, 900a, 901a, 902a, 903a, 904a, 905a, 906a, 907a, 908a, 909a, 910a, 911a, 912a, 913a, 914a, 915a, 916a, 917a, 918a, 919a, 920a, 921a, 922a, 923a, 924a, 925a, 926a, 927a, 928a, 929a, 930a, 931a, 932a, 933a, 934a, 935a, 936a, 937a, 938a, 939a, 940a, 941a, 942a, 943a, 944a, 945a, 946a, 947a, 948a, 949a, 950a, 951a, 952a, 953a, 954a, 955a, 956a, 957a, 958a, 959a, 960a, 961a, 962a, 963a, 964a, 965a, 966a, 967a, 968a, 969a, 970a, 971a, 972a, 973a, 974a, 975a, 976a, 977a, 978a, 979a, 980a, 981a, 982a, 983a, 984a, 985a, 986a, 987a, 988a, 989a, 990a, 991a, 992a, 993a, 994a, 995a, 996a, 997a, 998a, 999a, 1000a, 1001a, 1002a, 1003a, 1004a, 1005a, 1006a, 1007a, 1008a, 1009a, 1010a, 1011a, 1012a, 1013a, 1014a, 1015a, 1016a, 1017a, 1018a, 1019a, 1020a, 1021a, 1022a, 1023a, 1024a, 1025a, 1026a, 1027a, 1028a, 1029a, 1030a, 1031a, 1032a, 1033a, 1034a, 1035a, 1036a, 1037a, 1038a, 1039a, 1040a, 1041a, 1042a, 1043a, 1044a, 1045a, 1046a, 1047a, 1048a, 1049a, 1050a, 1051a, 1052a, 1053a, 1054a, 1055a, 1056a, 1057a, 1058a, 1059a, 1060a, 1061a, 1062a, 1063a, 1064a, 1065a, 1066a, 1067a, 1068a, 1069a, 1070a, 1071a, 1072a, 1073a, 1074a, 1075a, 1076a, 1077a, 1078a, 1079a, 1080a, 1081a, 1082a, 1083a, 1084a, 1085a, 1086a, 1087a, 1088a, 1089a, 1090a, 1091a, 1092a, 1093a, 1094a, 1095a, 1096a, 1097a, 1098a, 1099a, 1100a, 1101a, 1102a, 1103a, 1104a, 1105a, 1106a, 1107a, 1108a, 1109a, 1110a, 1111a, 1112a, 1113a, 1114a, 1115a, 1116a, 1117a, 1118a, 1119a, 1120a, 1121a, 1122a, 1123a, 1124a, 1125a, 1126a, 1127a, 1128a, 1129a, 1130a, 1131a, 1132a, 1133a, 1134a, 1135a, 1136a, 1137a, 1138a, 1139a, 1140a, 1141a, 1142a, 1143a, 1144a, 1145a, 1146a, 1147a, 1148a, 1149a, 1150a, 1151a, 1152a, 1153a, 1154a, 1155a, 1156a, 1157a, 1158a, 1159a, 1160a, 1161a, 1162a, 1163a, 1164a, 1165a, 1166a, 1167a, 1168a, 1169a, 1170a, 1171a, 1172a, 1173a, 1174a, 1175a, 1176a, 1177a, 1178a, 1179a, 1180a, 1181a, 1182a, 1183a, 1184a, 1185a, 1186a, 1187a, 1188a, 1189a, 1190a, 1191a, 1192a, 1193a, 1194a, 1195a, 1196a, 1197a, 1198a, 1199a, 1200a, 1201a, 1202a, 1203a, 1204a, 1205a, 1206a, 1207a, 1208a, 1209a, 1210a, 1211a, 1212a, 1213a, 1214a, 1215a, 1216a, 1217a, 1218a, 1219a, 1220a, 1221a, 1222a, 1223a, 1224a, 1225a, 1226a, 1227a, 1228a, 1229a, 1230a, 1231a, 1232a, 1233a, 1234a, 1235a, 1236a, 1237a, 1238a, 1239a, 1240a, 1241a, 1242a, 1243a, 1244a, 1245a, 1246a, 1247a, 1248a, 1249a, 1250a, 1251a, 1252a, 1253a, 1254a, 1255a, 1256a, 1257a, 1258a, 1259a, 1260a, 1261a, 1262a, 1263a, 1264a, 1265a, 1266a, 1267a, 1268a, 1269a, 1270a, 1271a, 1272a, 1273a, 1274a, 1275a, 1276a, 1277a, 1278a, 1279a, 1280a, 1281a, 1282a, 1283a, 1284a, 1285a, 1286a, 1287a, 1288a, 1289a, 1290a, 1291a, 1292a, 1293a, 1294a, 1295a, 1296a, 1297a, 1298a, 1299a, 1300a, 1301a, 1302a, 1303a, 1304a, 1305a, 1306a, 1307a, 1308a, 1309a, 1310a, 1311a, 1312a, 1313a, 1314a, 1315a, 1316a, 1317a, 1318a, 1319a, 1320a, 1321a, 1322a, 1323a, 1324a, 1325a, 1326a, 1327a, 1328a, 1329a, 1330a, 1331a, 1332a, 1333a, 1334a, 1335a, 1336a, 1337a, 1338a, 1339a, 1340a, 1341a, 1342a, 1343a, 1344a, 1345a, 1346a, 1347a, 1348a, 1349a, 1350a, 1351a, 1352a, 1353a, 1354a, 1355a, 1356a, 1357a, 1358a, 1359a, 1360a, 1361a, 1362a, 1363a, 1364a, 1365a, 1366a, 1367a, 1368a, 1369a, 1370a, 1371a, 1372a, 1373a, 1374a, 1375a, 1376a, 1377a, 1378a, 1379a, 1380a, 1381a, 1382a, 1383a, 1384a, 1385a, 1386a, 1387a, 1388a, 1389a, 1390a, 1391a, 1392a, 1393a, 1394a, 1395a, 1396a, 1397a, 1398a, 1399a, 1400a, 1401a, 1402a, 1403a, 1404a, 1405a, 1406a, 1407a, 1408a, 1409a, 1410a, 1411a, 1412a, 1413a, 1414a, 1415a, 1416a, 1417a, 1418a, 1419a, 1420a, 1421a, 1422a, 1423a, 1424a, 1425a, 1426a, 1427a, 1428a, 1429a, 1430a, 1431a, 1432a, 1433a, 1434a, 1435a, 1436a, 1437a, 1438a, 1439a, 1440a, 1441a, 1442a, 1443a, 1444a, 1445a, 1446a, 1447a, 1448a, 1449a, 1450a, 1451a, 1452a, 1453a, 1454a, 1455a, 1456a, 1457a, 1458a, 1459a, 1460a, 1461a, 1462a, 1463a, 1464a, 1465a, 1466a, 1467a, 1468a, 1469a, 1470a, 1471a, 1472a, 1473a, 1474a, 1475a, 1476a, 1477a, 1478a, 1479a, 1480a, 1481a, 1482a, 1483a, 1484a, 1485a, 1486a, 1487a, 1488a, 1489a, 1490a, 1491a, 1492a, 1493a, 1494a, 1495a, 1496a, 1497a, 1498a, 1499a, 1500a, 1501a, 1502a, 1503a, 1504a, 1505a, 1506a, 1507a, 1508a, 1509a, 1510a, 1511a, 1512a, 1513a, 1514a, 1515a, 1516a, 1517a, 1518a, 1519a, 1520a, 1521a, 1522a, 1523a, 1524a, 1525a, 1526a, 1527a, 1528a, 1529a, 1530a, 1531a, 1532a, 1533a, 1534a, 1535a, 1536a, 1537a, 153

# A LAST LONG TALK WITH

Only a few weeks before her death Marilyn Monroe talked at length to LIFE Associate Editor Richard Meryman about the effects of fame on her life. Her story was published in the August 3 issue. Here he recalls what Marilyn was like as she talked to him.

by RICHARD MERYMAN

If Marilyn Monroe was glad to see you, her "hello" will sound in your mind all of your life—the breathless warmth of the emphasis on the "lo," her well-deep eyes turned up toward you and her face radiantly crinkled in a wonderfully girlish smile.

I first experienced this when, after two get-acquainted meetings in New York, I came in the late afternoon several weeks ago to her Brentwood, Calif. home to begin a series of conversations on fame. Expecting one of the famous waits for Marilyn, I sat on the soft wall-to-wall carpet of the living room and began struggling to set up my tape recorder. Suddenly I became aware of a pair of brilliant yellow slacks upright beside me. In the slacks was Marilyn, silently watching me with a solicitous grin, very straight and slender with delicately narrow shoulders. She seemed shorter than I remembered and she looked spectacular in a loose-fitting blouse. I stood up and we greeted and she said, "Do you want my tape recorder? I bought one to play the poems of a friend of mine."

Before starting what was to be no less than a six-hour talk, she wanted to show me her house which she had personally searched out and bought. Describing it earlier she exclaimed, "... and it has walls." She had refused LIFE any pictures of it, saying, "I don't want everybody to see exactly where I live, what my sofa or my fireplace looks like. Do you know the book *Everyman*? Well, I want to stay just in the fantasy of *Everyman*."

It was a small, three-bedroom house built in Mexican style, the first home entirely her own she had ever had. She exulted in it. On a special trip to Mexico she had carefully searched in roadside stands and shops and even factories to find just the right things to put in it. The large items had not arrived—nor was she ever to see them installed. As she led me through the rooms, bare and makeshift as though someone lived there only temporarily, she described with loving excitement each couch and table and dresser, where it would go and what was special about it. The few small Mexican things—a tin candelabra, folding stools ingeniously carved from single pieces of wood, a leather-covered coffee table, tiles on the kitchen walls—revealed her impetuous, charming taste. Separate from the house, attached to her two-car garage, was a large room being converted to an apartment which would be, she explained, "a place for any friends of mine who are in some kind of trouble,

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Back in the house I remarked on the profusion of flowers outside. Her face grew bright and she said, "I don't know why, but I've always been able to make anything grow." She went on: "When I was married to Mr. Miller, we celebrated Hanukkah and I felt, well, we should have also a Christmas tree. But I couldn't stand the idea of going out and chopping off a Christmas tree."

In the living room, seated on a nondescript chair and sofa, we went on talking—after Marilyn poured herself a glass of champagne. At each question she paused thoughtfully.

"I'm trying to find the nailhead, not just strike a blow," she said. Then a deep breath and out her thoughts would tumble, breathless words falling over breathless words. Once she said, "One way basically to handle fame is with honesty and I mean it and the other way to handle it when something happens—as things have happened recently, and I've had other things happen to me, suddenly, my goodness, the things they try to do to you, it's hard to take—I handle with silence."

Her infections came as surprising

twists and every emotion was in full bravura, acted out with exuberant gestures. Across her face flashed anger, wistfulness, bravado, tenderness, ruefulness, high humor and deep sadness. And each idea usually ended in a startling turn of thought, with her laugh rising to a delighted squeak. "I think I have always had a little humor," said Marilyn. "I guess sometimes people just sort of questioned 'does she know what she's saying,' and sometimes you do all of a sudden think about something else and you didn't mean to say it exactly. I'm pointing at me. I don't digest things with my mind. If I did, the whole thing wouldn't work. Then I'd just be kind of an intellectual and that I'm not interested in."

At this point I began to see that Marilyn did nothing by halves. Of her millions of fans she said, "The least I can do is give them the best they can get from me. What's the good of drawing in the neat breath if all you do is let it out and draw in another?" I could also see how important it was to her to feel that the person she talked to "understood."

Understanding apparently me being very sympathetic, taking the side in everything, recognizing the nuances of her meanings and values all that she valued, especially small things. When I showed genuine enthusiasm for her house, she said, "Good, anybody who likes my house I'm sure I'll get along with."

But I had the constant, uneasy feeling that my status with her was precarious, that if I grew the least careless she might suddenly decide that I, like many others she felt had let her down, did not understand. Once I slangily asked her how she "cranked up" to do a scene. I was instantly confronted by queenly outrage: "I don't crank anything. I'm not a Model T. I think that's kind of disrespectful to refer to it that way."

But I could not feel impatient with her impatience. It was all so understandable as she talked about the people who wrote columns and stories about her: "They go around and mostly your enemies. Friends they say, 'Let's check and see if this is right with her.'" And then she admitted wistfully: "You know, most people really don't know me." There was grief in her eyes when she described





Only a few weeks before her death Marilyn Monroe talked at length to LIFE Associate Editor Richard Meryman about the effects of fame on her life. Her story was published in the August 3 issue. Here he recalls what Marilyn was like as she talked to him.

by RICHARD MERYMAN

If Marilyn Monroe was glad to see you, her "hello" will sound in your mind all of your life—the breathless warmth of the emphasis on the "lo," her well-deep eyes turned up toward you and her face radiantly crinkled in a wonderfully girlish smile.

I first experienced this when, after two get-acquainted meetings in New York, I came in the late afternoon several weeks ago to her Brentwood, Calif. home to begin a series of conversations on fame. Expecting one of the famous waits for Marilyn, I sat on the soft wall-to-wall carpet of the living room and began struggling to set up my tape recorder. Suddenly I became aware of a pair of brilliant yellow slacks upright beside me. In the slacks was Marilyn, silently watching me with a solicitous grin, very straight and slender with delicately narrow shoulders. She seemed shorter than I remembered and she looked spectacular in a loose-fitting blouse. I stood up and we greeted and she said, "Do you want my tape recorder? I bought one to play the poems of a friend of mine."

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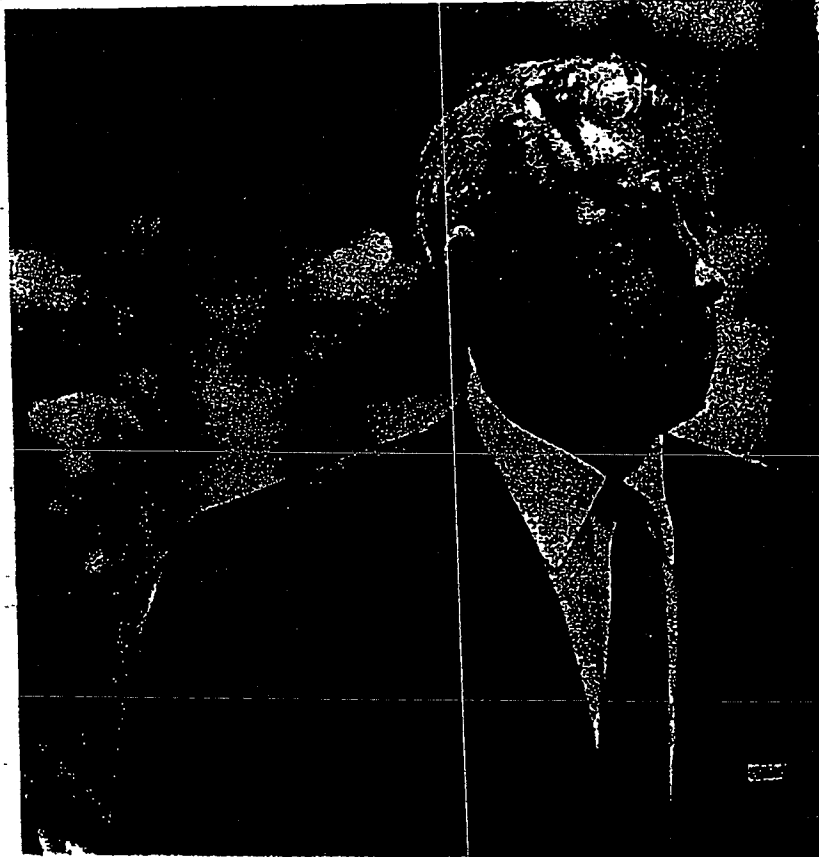
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# A LONELY GIRL

*Her legacy of beauty:  
Marilyn on pages 63-71*

Now she had once found her stepson Bobby Miller hiding a magazine containing a lurid article about her, and now Joe DiMaggio Jr used to be haunted at school because of her. "You know, ha, ha, your stepmother Marilyn Monroe, ha, ha, ha. All that kind of stuff." And there was warning in her voice as she returned over and over again to "kids, and older people and workingmen" as a source of warmth in her life, as the threatening people who treated her brutally, whom she could meet spontaneously. I felt a rush of protectiveness for her, a wish—perhaps the sort that was at the root of the public's fondness for Marilyn—to keep her from anything ugly and hurtful.

Before I left late that night she asked to be sent a transcript of the interview. "I often wake up in the night," she explained, "and I like to have something to think about."

When I arrived the next afternoon for a second session she immediately asked to postpone our talk. She was tired out, she said, from negotiations with 20th Century-Fox over resumption of *Something's Got to Give*. But she hospitably offered me a drink and chatted. She was obviously upset.

But there was no hint of morose despair. She was electric with indignation and began talking angrily about how studios treat their stars. Then she paused, said she needed something to help overcome her tiredness and got a glass of champagne. I asked if she had ever wished that she were tougher. She answered, "Yes—but I don't think it would be very feminine to be tough. Guess I'll settle for the way I am."

We were interrupted when her doctor arrived. Marilyn bounded out to the kitchen, returned with a little ampule, and holding it up to me said, "No kidding, they're making me take liver shots. Here, I'll prove it to you." By then she was willing to talk on, and it was nearly midnight when Marilyn jumped up and announced she was going to throw a steak on the grill. She came back to say there was no steak and no food at all. Before I left one of the last things she said was, "With fame, you know, you can read about yourself, somebody else's ideas about you, but what's important is how you feel about yourself—for survival and liv-

ing day to day with what comes up."

Over the weekend Marilyn was scheduled to pose for pictures so I suggested we eat breakfast before her noon appointment. She agreed and I arrived on Saturday at 10. I rang the doorbell repeatedly. No answer. But through the window I could see a man sitting in her little glassed-in porch, reading a magazine with the bored patience of somebody who had been there a long time. I waited and rang for 10 minutes, then went away for an hour. At 11 my ring was answered by Marilyn's housekeeper, Mrs. Murray, who took me to wait in a guest room just off a tiny hall from Marilyn's bedroom. At noon Mrs. Murray took a tray of breakfast in to her. Shortly afterward Marilyn came out and said hello.

I then became a witness to the fabled process of Marilyn preparing for an appointment—and being four hours late for it. The patient gentleman was her hairdresser, Mr. Kenneth. While he worked on her and she sat under the dryer I could hear up-roarious laughter. Then, in her curriers, she made little barefooted errands about the house and in and out of her room, phone calls, visits to me

to ask if I was comfortable, all busy bustling, getting nothing done. There was none of the fearful moping and preening in front of mirrors I had heard so much about. She was entirely cheerful and utterly disorganized. I could not help feeling that what some people blamed on stagefright might partly be her endless debt to time. The necessary mechanics of daily living were beyond her grasp; she always started out behind and never caught up.

Finally she was almost ready and she came trippingly into the room where I sat. She wore high heels, orange slacks, a brassiere, and held an orange blouse carelessly across her bosom. "Do I look like a pumpkin in this outfit?" she asked. She looked wonderful. "You'll set the fashion industry ahead 10 years," I said. She was very pleased and answered, "You think so? Good!"

Two days later I called Marilyn for another appointment to talk over the final draft of her story. She said, "Come anytime, like, you know, for breakfast." There was in her voice a note which I had come to recognize—an appealing eagerness to please. I came again at 10 and once again she slept till noon. Finally we sat down together on a tiny sofa. She was barefooted, wearing a robe, and had not yet washed off last night's mascara. Her delicate hair was in a sleep-tumbled whirl. But she had made me feel this was a compliment. "Friends," she had said, "accept you the way you are." As was usual, her face was very pale. She held the manuscript high in front of her eyes and carefully read it aloud, listening to every phrase to be sure it sounded exactly like her.

She kept the manuscript and I returned for it late that afternoon. On the steps of the house she showed me changes she had penciled in, all of them small. She asked me to take out a remark about quietly giving money to needy individuals. And then we said goodbye. As I walked away she suddenly called after me, "Hey, thanks." I turned to look back and there she stood, very still and strangely forlorn. I thought then of her reaction earlier when I had asked if many friends had called up to rally round when she was fired by Fox. There was silence, and sitting very straight, eyes wide and hurt, she had answered with a tiny "No."

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# A LONELY GIRL

Marilyn on pages 68-71

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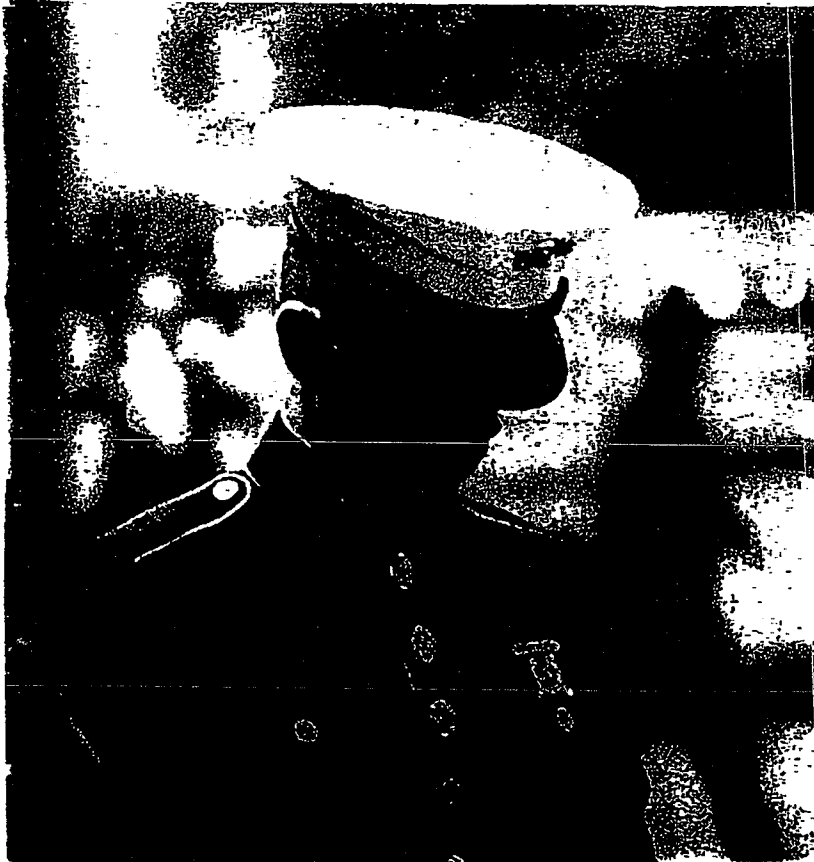
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CONTINUED 38